/11 cont./

682 killed under the obligation of killing either the murderer or one of the latter's relatives. A blood-feud passes from generation to generation and is a person's sacred duty; unavenged blood is considered a shame and a disgrace for the living relatives of the person killed. The Abkhaz believe that if for some reason or other blood remains unavenged, it will avenge itself.

In case the killer himself managed to escape, a relative
[628] of his was held responsible; he was killed, captured, or robbed and finally ruined. Even the killing of the meanest slave often led to clashes involving whole villages; if a mutual understanding and peace were not restored among them, the result of such a feud would be that one of the villages had to face ruin or move away to another place.

682 In blood-feuds the descent of the persons involved played
565 an important role. If, for instance, a prince killed a peasant, the relatives of the latter had no right to avenge the blood of the killed upon the killer, for "the blood of a peasant is not equal to that of a prince." Therefore, instead of the prince himself,
[608] it was his foster father who had to pay for the blood shed by the prince.

There were different settlements for the blood of a peasant, a nobleman, or a prince.

Although the personal qualities of a man commanded /12/ special attention in Abkhazia the blood of a peasant was nevertheless valued lower than the blood of a nobleman, and that of the latter lower than the blood of a prince. For instance, if the blood of a peasant was valued at five human souls, then the blood of a nobleman was worth three times more, and that of a prince five times more than the blood of a peasant. The price
[435] of a life was determined in terms of spans /pyad'/. A soul (person) four spans tall was valued at 30 cows or 30 rubles in silver; one of five spans, 50 cows or 50 silver rubles; and one of six spans, 70 cows or 70 rubles in silver. Arms and clothing were added as supplementary payment. Blood was paid off with cows, goats, sheep, and beehives. The number of the latter was determined on the basis of the value of a cow.

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5?6 enter a house is decided with the same ceremoniousness. Or, for example, when two horsemen meet each other in the forest. If the younger of the two has something to say to the older one, he must dismount and speak while standing on the ground. At that point, the older one urges him to speak without dismounting.

/14/ The language of the Abkhaz also bears witness to their politeness. In conversation they often use such expressions as: "I ask that your sickness will pass on to me," "may I become the victim of your sicknesses," "may I be the victim instead of you," "may I go around the place where you are lying," etc. In keeping with this last expression, an Abkhaz woman, when visiting her sick foster-child or a person she has not seen for a [608] [755] long time, walks three times around him with the words, "Itsge mtsuge seizgat," i. e. "may I carry away your sickness, your misfortune."

For every occasion in life, the Abkhaz has a special greeting, in which are expressed his wishes for prosperity, strength, victory, fertility, profit, etc. In this repertoire of various Abkhaz greetings, there are even some which are especially meant for occasions when one meets persons who are going to a horse-race, greetings for the person who is arranging 181 the races, and so forth. And this is quite understandable and natural for a people such as the Abkhaz, for whom horse and arms constitute the most beloved things, which they have been accustomed to value highly almost from the cradle. The children ● [565] of members of the upper classes in the very first years of their lives become excellent riders and weapon-bearers. Pistol, [411] [293] dagger, saber, knife, and a whole arsenal of weapons are the constant adornment of every Abkhaz man. For him there is no greater pleasure than to ride armed from head to foot, a burka thrown over him, in the company of his comrades, singing a merry song. Without a horse and arms, life is not worth living to an Abkhaz!

526 Besides horse-races and trick-riding, the following games [541] are worth noting in the life of the Abkhaz: 1. the ball-game, 538 2. arkil-riki, and 3. stone-throwing. The folk-music and folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager.

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428 (eits'bshakhu /see foreign text/). After the settlement for seniority and minority, all that is left is divided equally among the brothers; in addition, the youngest receives the father's house, yard, etc. Sisters receive less than brothers.

593 Kind and affable in public, the Abkhaz at home is rather stern, imperious, and so taciturn that it is as if he were too lazy, or at any rate not sufficiently inclined, to spare a single kind or friendly word for the members of his household. The Abkhaz woman enjoys a great deal of freedom. She is no less busy than
562 the man; for instance, she carries the maize to the mill herself,
462 and in some places she grinds it herself with a hand mill. In summer, she works, hoe in hand, side by side with the man in the maize-field. The wives of the members of the higher classes
[565] toil no less than their husbands, but, on the other hand, they enjoy more freedom and are held more in esteem than is the case otherwise.

562 A woman is treated with respect and esteem by young and
[535] old. Women attend community meetings, mourning rites, funeral banquets; they are present at the gatherings of the men
[579] and dance with them. There have been instances of women being the leaders of the abragi in night raids. Women perform religious rites and ceremonies. But with all this, the Abkhaz woman is expected to be innocent and modest, and to speak to older men politely and courteously.

562 If her husband divorces her without sufficient reason, the
586 Abkhaz woman has the right to appear at the village meeting and
[692] defend herself. And she skillfully uses this right: she goes to the meeting with as much determination as her husband; and defends herself with great eloquence. While the husband can divorce his wife on various grounds, she can do the same to her husband if he has done her any wrong.

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III.

Education -- The Educated -- The Educators

565 While the upper class in Abkhazia enjoyed privilege and
566 power, the situation of the lower classes was one of great oppression; /19/ the batoni (master, feudal lord) looked upon his subject, his slave, as a commodity; he could sell or pawn him
[567] according to circumstances. However, even after the abolition of slavery, the position of the peasantry did not improve, due to
[579] the fact that the nobility did not cease from robbery and pillage and plunder until the most recent times.

565 Under such a state of affairs, all the peasantry could do
608 was to resign itself to feudal conditions and try, wherever possible, to get protection. The best method lay in the custom of adoption, or the rearing of the sons of the aristocrats by the peasants. Thanks to this custom, the aristocrats themselves were strengthened, for in this way they gained in the peasants their most faithful supporters, while at the same time freeing their wives from the onerous duty of bringing up and feeding their own children. This is the reason that in all Abkhazia there is not a single peasant who has not reared one or several princes and nobles; as a consequence of this custom, hardly one per cent of the nobles have been nursed at their own mother's breast.

Before the beginning of childbirth in a family of the aristocracy (didebuli), on the one hand relatives and acquaintances and, on the other hand, the future foster-mothers of the expected child, accompanied by their husbands and female relatives in order to be able to bear the newborn foster-child back to their village with due ceremony, begin to gather around the pregnant
844 woman. During the childbirth, girls from the village also come to
565 visit the expectant mother in order to distract her and to relieve
[533] her sufferings during labor with gay songs and the telling of fables
[538] and fairy tales. The husband is absent during this time. According to the customs of the country, he is not allowed to be present when his wife gives birth and therefore leaves the home. Above

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844 565 the bed of the expectant mother a cord is suspended from the ceiling, which she can grasp during the severe pains and spasms of childbirth. It is indecent for her to let her moans and screams reach the ears of her parents-in-law; she must staunchly bear her sufferings so as not to lose their respect forever. At last the child is delivered. The birth of a boy brings more joy to the [842] mother than the birth of a girl, as it gives her more respect and honor in the eyes of society, but she is not particularly saddened by the birth of a daughter either, for it still serves as proof of her fertility. The newborn child is left in the care of the wet nurse [608] (the wife of the foster father), and the female relatives congratu- [853] late the new mother on the happy /20/ outcome of the delivery. The mother, too, is happy, and most of all, of course, because with the passing of the baby into the care of others she herself will soon recover and, free from caring for it, can more easily preserve her beauty and freshness of face. In a few days her husband returns and in his turn congratulates her on the delivery of her child (1).

1. Cf. the excellent article, "Abkhazia," by K. Machavariani in the newspaper Iveriia, 1884, No. 275.

608 565 On the day set for the departure of the wet nurse with the newborn baby, the parents give a banquet and give her the materials for a dress, for underwear, and for all the appurtenances for the child's cradle, a copper kettle to bathe it in, and other small articles.

From this day on the foster mother receives the honorary title of anadzdzei (nurse, foster mother), and both she and her husband, the abadzdzei (foster father), are held in universal respect; upon its entry into the house of the foster father and mother, the baby is recognized as a ward (akhupha) of the family to which the foster father belongs.

The foster parents cherish the child in due fashion and maintain him in comfort and contentment. After two or three [431] years the child is taken to its parents, along with presents consisting of one or two bulls, a goat, capons, wine, bread, etc.

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565 608 In the house of the child's parents, another banquet is held, to which the neighbors are also invited. On this occasion all kinds of honors are shown to the foster mother and her husband. The foster parents are granted the right to be the first to wash their hands, and upon their return home the parents of the child must seat them on their horses, i.e., when they mount, the stirrups on the other side must be held. The foster parents return home with [431] the child, loaded with all kinds of presents, animals, clothes, money.

The foster child remains with the foster parents during the course of eight or nine years, and then it is taken to the real parents. It hardly need be said that the child, having spent its early years in someone else's home, where it grew up and learned to walk, talk, and to love its foster mother and those surroundings, now has difficulty in adjusting itself to the new situation -- at [154] first the father's house seems almost like a prison to him. For this reason the child is allowed to visit the foster parents frequently. If the foster child is an orphan, however, he remains in the home and under the care of his foster parents until he is married.

/21/ The foster child is obligated to defend the interests of the foster parents, i.e. of that family whose members reared him. He is required, for instance, to search for a lost article belonging to his foster parents, to find the thief and to call him to account, and it is a great disgrace to him if he is unable to do this. In the same way, if someone offends the foster parents and they are not strong enough to pay back the insult, their ward must stand up for them. Let us suppose, for instance, that some prince has beaten a peasant. In this case the ward of the injured peasant must de- [683] mand satisfaction, not from the princely offender himself, for "his blood is unequal to that of a peasant," but from his foster parent, a peasant, and he is the one who has to answer for the insult inflicted upon the foster parent of another prince. If a peasant foster-father gets into any kind of trouble, his princely ward endeavors by hook or by crook to rescue him from his difficulties. In such cases, if the ward himself is still immature and unable to help his foster parents, then his parents act in his place.

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565 608 This, however, does not exhaust the role of the ward with regard to his foster parent. He is the main character in the joys and sorrows of his foster parent; in all the occasions of his life that have any importance. Thus, when his foster mother, or her husband, or one of their children dies, he bewails them bitterly, [765] dresses in mourning, lets his hair grow, buys the coffin at his own [764] expense, and takes care of the arrangements and the ceremonial for the mourning and the funeral of the deceased. When the funeral banquet is given, he provides a sheep or a horse and again arranges everything. The ward also is the main character [583] when the son of his foster mother abducts a girl to be his wife; if the relatives of the girl pursue the abductor, the princely ward comes to his aid with words and weapons and does not give up the abducted girl; subsequently he keeps her at his house until the matter is definitely settled, for none of the relatives of the abducted girl would dare to attack his home.

If, on the other hand, the marriage of the son or daughter [584] of the foster father is arranged peacefully by the voluntary consent of both sides, then here, too, the princely ward is considered the bridegroom's best man and presents the bride with money, a horse, etc.

The foster parents in turn do not fail to perform their duties with regard to their ward, whom they call their sun, their /22/ sacredness, and by whose name they swear. Every year at [431] Christmastide they give him presents, such as cheese, capons, and bread; at Easter, a lamb or a kid and "chumukhkvati." These presents are the obligatory outward signs of sincere liking and friendship on the part of lesser ones ("lower brotherhood") towards those of higher rank; with their cessation the mutual friendship is also broken off.

The sons of the foster mother are usually the bosom friends [579] and accomplices of the ward in his nocturnal thieving adventures. That is why a prince or nobleman always takes the sons of his foster mother with him on his thieving expeditions; he knows that

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565 608 [579] [964] [965] [585] they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for him if necessary. When a ward dies, the grief and sorrow of the foster parents are unbounded; for his funeral they furnish a shroud and money; they also bring one or two bulls, sheep, etc. for the funeral repast for the deceased. When their ward marries, they give him all kinds of assistance through their personal labor. They also present him with fattened animals and bring presents to his bride as well.

608 565 796 Among the Abkhaz another type of wardship also exists, namely, that of an adult man being invited to assume the role of ward. The Abkhaz peasant invites such a man with the words, "I wish to take you into my house and honor you according to my means." On the appointed day, the person invited goes to the house of his future foster father and takes along a few additional people. During the supper the host and his relatives kneel down in front of their ward-to-be and give him a glass of wine; they then stand and one of them addresses to him the following speech: "From this day on we regard you as having been nursed in our family; we are of the same spirit as you and will begrudge you nothing; we hope that you, too, will begrudge us nothing; you will be held in higher esteem than the other wards." After this they present him with a few rubles and give something to his companions (khadzh /see foreign text/). While handing over the presents, they say, "Vadcha enup" (a present for you). This ceremony ends in the following way: on a carpet, spread on the floor, a chest is placed, on which the wife of the host of the house, i.e., the future foster mother, seats herself; the other women surround her. Then the ward-to-be enters through the open door, stands in front of the hostess seated on the chest, greets her, /23/ and thrice touches with his lips the nipple of her breast, or, as the Abkhaz say, "bites her nipples three times"; after each time he repeats, "from this day on you are my own mother." And indeed, from this time on exactly the same mutual relations obtain between them as in the first case where another's child is fully reared. It need hardly be said that, besides the princes and nobles, the

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608 peasants also rear the children of clergymen, of merchants, and
565 even of other peasants. There are also cases of even nobles taking in and rearing the sons of strong and influential princes on the same basis.

IV.

Marriage

583 Some fifteen years ago the groom usually abducted a girl for a wife; that is to say, without the consent of the girl's parents or her own consent, he carried out an attack upon her with the help of his comrades and led her away by force. Such cases are rare nowadays. On the contrary, abductions are now for the greater part carried out with the consent of the bride herself, though not infrequently against the will of her parents. In the latter case, the one chosen as a bride comes at night to a previously arranged place a few versts from the parental home. The groom comes to the same place with his comrades, on horses. She mounts a horse brought especially for her, and the whole cavalcade gallops back to the home of the groom or to that of some influential person. No pursuers are able to take the bride away from the abductors, for they are prepared, if necessary, to fight to the last drop of blood for her. Soon after the abduction the girl herself announces publicly that the abduction took place according to her personal wishes and that she can be happy only with her abductor. Mutual negotiations are now
[584] initiated and everything ends in peace; the son-in-law brings presents to the mother and the father of the bride, and the case is closed.

584 It must be noted that the Abkhaz never abducts a girl lower
583 in standing than himself. This would be considered a loss of
[558] honor for the abductor. On the contrary, everybody tries to abduct a girl of higher or at least equal birth. To propose to a
[154] girl and to receive a refusal either from her or from her parents

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782 and has been brought into the smithy, the blacksmith puts
326 all his instruments on the anvil; a brazier with coals is placed nearby and the whole family kneels down around the anvil. After taking off his bashlyk and his belt (as proof that he addresses Shasha with an open heart and mind), the smith lights a wax candle, throws incense on the coals of the brazier, and prays to Shasha to bless him and his family with good health and long life, and to make the instruments forged from iron do him good rather than harm. After all those present have pronounced "Amen" at the end of the prayer, the master of the house cuts pieces of the pie and of the organs roasted on the nut-wood spit and throws them on the brazier with the words: "Until that time when I am unable /54/ to feed with these little pieces all Shervashidzi and Anchabadzi, let no one in my family fall ill. I pray to you for this, Shasha, bringing to you a real sacrifice." The smith then cuts off just such little pieces from the other sacrifices and distributes them to all the members of the family, who eat them and wash them down with three swallows
[273] of wine. The host designates the wine for this repast immediately after the harvesting of the grapes and saves it in a separate jug called shẽsher gaphshi, buried in the smithy itself; under the fear of punishment by Shasha, no one dares to touch it, even in any extremity, before New Year's Eve, neither the host himself nor, all the more, one of the bystanders. Upon the completion of the praying, the prepared dishes are transferred to the house of the smith, where the neighbors gather and feast to the glory of Shasha until dawn.

782 Several princes also offer a prayer to Shasha on New
776 Year's Eve, in which case each of the persons present, having
● 565 been at one time dependent on these princes, brings a rooster. Shasha is one of those divinities called upon by the Abkhaz more often than others.

776 According to the understanding of the Abkhaz, the divinity whose name is called falsely immediately punishes the guilty one by those means or tools which are in the field of his specialty. Thus, for instance, one who has called

C [760 cont.]
565 and noblemen and who had thus [761] become noble themselves;
C and serfs (tšo'kŏtl). The last were either peasants and could not
[566] be sold individually, or they were servants and were sometimes freed (begaulia). The peasants had to attend to the needs and obligations of the nobles, and these to those of the princes, but in return received gifts from them. In the case of disputes and
C on important occasions, princes, noblemen, and respected peas-
[627] ants took council together. This feudal system was most highly
C developed in Kabarda, and the Kabardin were the teachers of the
[197] neighboring peoples as far as mode of living, horsemanship,
A dress, and weapons were concerned. A pronounced aristocratic
● [565] pride prevailed among the Cherkess, and their noblemen considered themselves as high as the princes of the Abkhaz and others. Therefore, at marriage the greatest weight was placed on equality of birth; sons of the princes by serf girls could become princes only through marriage with princesses, and then only princes of third degree.

C The Cherkess sold many of the serfs and slaves to Turkey,
439 where the Cherkess women were sought for their beauty; they
[567] were never daughters of the princes or noblemen, however, who
[565] were only to be won by their peers through marriage and bride price, but rather, except for personal slaves, they dealt in
C Abkhaz women and captives from the Cossacks and other enemy
560 peoples. Slaves could achieve freedom through marriage to a
591 Cherkess woman or through adoption; this was accomplished by having the slave, as mentioned above, suckle at the breast of the woman in question in the presence of the senior member of the kin group (cf. p. 76).

A Marriage. Up to fifty years ago among the Abkhaz the
583 young men, accompanied by friends, used to steal a girl of equal rank whom they desired as a wife. Today the abduction
A takes place by an understanding with the girl or her parents, but
[584] usually the suitor works through a mediator (dade) or female matchmaker and pays a purchase price, besides the reciprocal gifts. Refusal of the offer results in abduction or alienation of the kin group.

A After the betrothal banquet the groom remains for
585 three days in the bride's house or in the vicinity, but he may not